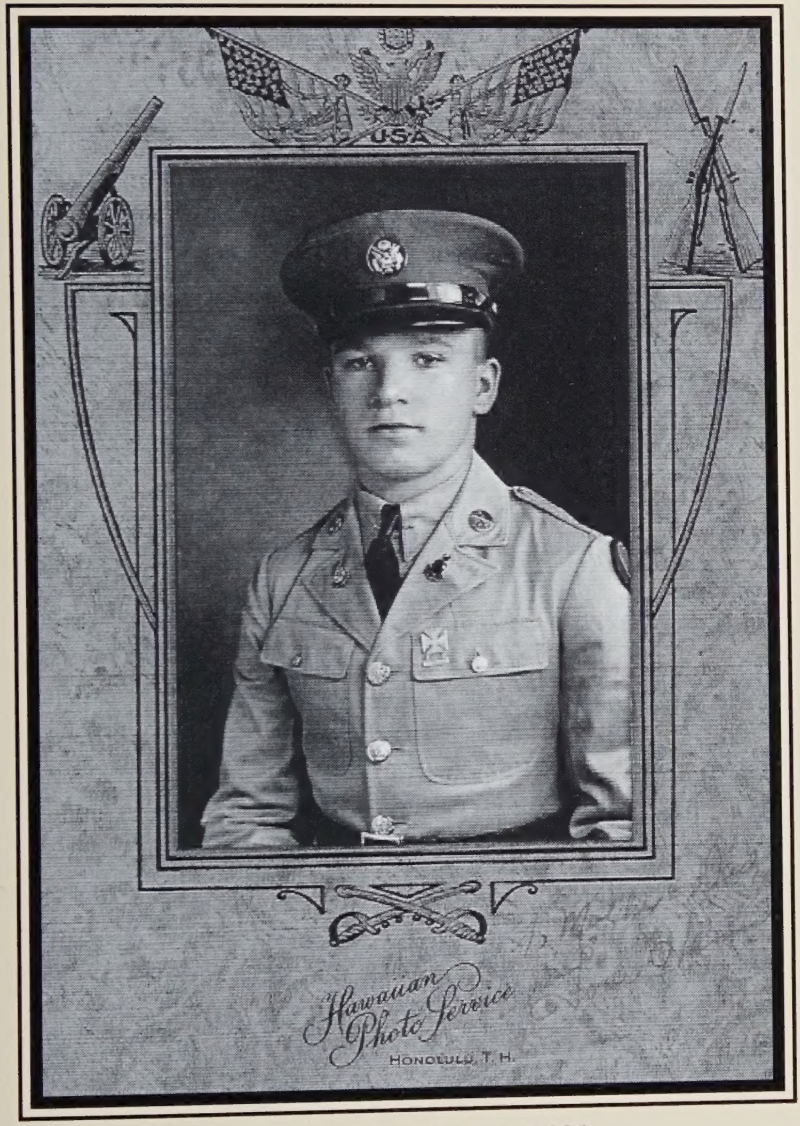
Clatsop County Historical Society Quarterly

CUMTUX



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MRS. LYLE MARY WHEELER

In This Issue . . .

The theme for this issue of *Cumtux* might be how children combine work with play and, in time, learn the responsibilities of adults.

John Seeborg reminisced about growing up in the Depression years when spending money was earned only by initiative and invention. Pride and confidence were the results. Some funny memories were recorded in his autobiography brought by him to CCHS.

Few teachers at AHS attracted a following as Mrs. Lyle Mary Wheeler did. Mrs. Wheeler had a good sense of humor and was open to new ideas like the Torcher Hole Club proposed by Ralph Norgaard. In a recorded interview with Ralph, he described some of this popular club's crazy events. He also talked about his college football career, finding employment, and living in Deep River, Washington.

Also, in this issue is a story Barbara Gonzalez wrote for a Clatsop Community College class by Dr. Julie Brown in 2009 after interviewing people who grew up in a Deep River logging camp.

—The Editor

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CUMTUX: Chinook jargon:
"To know...to inform"

A Finn From Astoria

by John E. Seeborg
Introduction by Lawrence Seeborg

John Seeborg's early life was typical for a boy growing up in the 1920s and 1930s in Astoria. And he had plenty of company. He was one of thirteen children of Vic and Fanny Seeborg, who survived to adulthood. Their first child, Bill, was born in 1905, and their last daughter, Lora Jean, was born in 1931. John and his twin brother, Arvid, arrived in 1918, at the midpoint of this twenty-six-year period. The early life of the Seeborg family in Astoria was written by John's brother, Arnold, and was published in the Autumn 1984 issue of *Cumtux*. Later, a short history of each of Vic and Fanny's children was presented in this publication's Spring and Summer 2018 issues.

John was the "life of the party" at family reunions with his many jokes and anecdotes, bringing forth peals of laughter from those in attendance. And, if given the opportunity, he was happy to pull out his harmonica to play a tune. However, his primary loves were those of the entire Seeborg family, especially his immediate family, including his wife, Jane, and their daughters, Suzanne and Kirsten (Kit). John worked as an insurance agent for most of his life and lived for many years in McMinnville, Oregon, until his death in 2002.

John thought that family history should be preserved. He encouraged his nephew, Lawrence, to investigate and write the WWII history of his brother, Arvid, who died in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in 1942 (*Cumtux*, Spring 2003). In the 1990s, John began writing the history of his immediate family. He completed this task on the Fourth of July in 1998. This family history was written primarily for his four grandchildren. However, he also donated a copy to the Clatsop County Historical Society for their archives. On the last page of his history, he said, "If the Society... finds short portions worth including in their publication, *Cumtux*, that will be all right with me." The following pages contain some of John's memories and impressions of his early life in Astoria taken from his family history, *A Finn From Astoria*.

Seeborgs In The Beginning

Prior to 1918, Russia was the ruler over Finland, which was sort of squeezed between Russia and Sweden. In the late 1880s, two families, unrelated and unknown to each other, chose to leave Finland for America. One was the Reinikka family, the other the Tolvanen family. Johan and Eva Maria Reinikka and three of their children, including a young girl named Fanny, settled in Astoria's fishing community at the mouth of the Columbia River. Frederick Tolvanen brought his family, including his young son, Victor, to the farming area near Kelso, Washington, on the Cowlitz River.

Not long after the family became settled, Victor Ferdinand Tolvanen, then about eleven, accompanied his father to the county courthouse, where his father petitioned the court to change his name to "Seeborg." From that day on, Victor, his brother Hugo, their sisters Ida and Anna, and their parents were to be known as "Seeborg." No one has heard of any reason for the change in name, only theories.

At age fifteen, Fanny Elvira Reinikka, her sister, Josefiina, and their brother, William, settled in Astoria with their parents while other siblings had previously settled elsewhere: Aldrick in Quincy, near Clatskanie, about forty miles upriver from Astoria; Edward and Jacob in a farming area called Brush Prairie, near Vancouver, Washington. (*Reinikka Ancestors and Descendants*, page 102-103)

Image courtesy of Lawrence Seeborg

Vic and Fanny Seeborg – circa 1920. About two years after their twins, John & Arvid were born.

Destiny had Victor and Fanny meet in Astoria about 1903. A romance developed, and the wedding took place on August 24th, 1904, barely two months after Fanny's seventeenth birthday. Victor was twenty-one. Children were born of this marriage at fairly regular intervals; first, Victor William ("Bill") on June 21st, 1905, then Hugo Henry on November 21st, 1906, Hannah Marie on August 8th, 1909, Hilma Elvira on January 21st, 1912, Edward Francis on October 22nd, 1913, and Helen Ida on January 24th, 1916.

it. When Eddie and Mary got home, they noticed the door missing and asked what had happened to it. Mickey said that Butchie told them that "he thought that it was looking so bad that he decided to take it off so that it would look better." The only thing that his father said, according to Mickey, was, "That's a good idea." So, he got away with that stunt without them knowing, and Mickey never told them until years later.

Diane lived in a house just over from Mickey, and they played together regularly. Diane's dad, Eric Johnson, worked for Deep River logging as a blacksmith, and she can remember his boss, Fred Strom, giving money to the kids at Christmas. She remembers the pop machine that was in the office and how ice cold the drinks were when they came out-Orange Crush was her favorite. Her mom, Ila Johnson, worked as a flunky (waitress) in the cookhouse, and Diane was expected to finish the supper that would have been started when she got home. Diane got an allowance of twenty dollars a month to do this and to help with the housework.

They rode the school bus into Naselle to go to school. In one instance in the wintertime, she can remember the road by Larson's Hill was slick; the bus driver "had all the children get off the bus at the bottom of the hill except for Ralph Olmsted and Delbert Bergquist. They got to ride. Boy, were we ticked off at that."

When they first moved to the camp, Diane's parents told her and her sister that they would be getting a surprise and that it was on the moving truck. Diane was certain it was toys and told her new friends that they were getting new toys. "Imagine my surprise, shock, and disappointment when a new bedroom set was unloaded from the van, and we were told that was the surprise. I've laughed over that incident many times over the years." Evelyn, Diane's sister, went to school with some of the kids from the camp. They moved into the camp right before school started that year, and she "entered the second grade with Mickey, Bunny Engleson, and Joann Balza. It was nice to already know some classmates." Their dad, being the "blacksmith and welder in the camp, could fix or make just about anything for the woods." He "worked long hours when things broke down so that everything would be ready for the next day, even some Saturdays and Sundays."

She enjoyed playing with the Tonka trucks that Steve Hurse had and remembered that they played on the hillside between the house and the train tracks. They had fun sliding down the hill on pieces of cardboard. Her mom and Mary Hurse would take the kids almost anywhere, and Eddie Hurse used to take the kids to basketball games.

There was "always room for two more kids." A couple of times on the way home, they would find a slide on the road, and the car could not get through, so they "would have to walk in the dark to Schlick's or Appelo's and they would take us home."

Playing in the pond was another fun thing to do, and one winter when she was sick, Diane helped Evelyn climb out of the window so that she could skate on the ice. All the kids were playing there, and she fell through the ice. When Diane went home to change her clothes, they got caught. "We both were in trouble, but I got over my cold and cough in a hurry. We still laugh about that one."

Evelyn remembers hearing a story about Bunny Engleson that happened before they moved there. Bunny was about five or six, and after the train had finished its morning run, she climbed onto the train and it took off with her. The men saw the train moving and ran after it. I "don't know what kind of trouble she got into." Bunny's brother used to repeat the bad language that he heard from the loggers, and he never got into trouble for saying them, but Bunny did. So, Bunny and Evelyn would "go out somewhere, sit by a tree, and say all the bad words we could think of. The trees didn't seem to mind."

During the time that they lived there, several houses burned down, and there was a fire in the woods close to the camp. Wayne Jacob's house was one that burned down. Mickey said that "his family went to the movies in Ilwaco, to see *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and when they got back to the camp, they found that the oil stove in their house had exploded."

Shirley Olmstead thinks fondly of the memories of growing up in the camp. She can remember playing in the woods and in the river. The kids used to walk across a log to get to the other side of the river, knowing that they would get in trouble if their parents found out. Playing on the train tracks was always great fun, and putting pennies on them was a favorite thing to do. She loved to pick huckleberries and knew the best places to go to find them.

Shirley also remembers riding the school bus and told me that there was one time when just after Steve Bergquist had gotten on, they had to wait for the train to go by at the bottom of Larson's Hill. Just as the last car of logs was going by, it lost its load, and the logs rolled off. Shirley said, "Luckily, the logs rolled across the road and down the bank of the road. Needless to say, we had a lot to talk about that day at school."

The kids used to go to the cookhouse and get treats because Diane's mom and some of the other moms worked there. They all felt very safe in the camp, and nobody locked

their doors. The kids never bullied one another, but, like all kids, they did pick on one another a little bit.

Jim was born while his parents lived in the camp. They moved for a short time to Ilwaco and then came back. When they first came back, there was no house for them to move into, so they stayed in the bunkhouses with the guys. Jim remembers that he stayed in one house while his parents, George and Despina Natseos, and his sister Corrine lived in another. Both of his parents worked in the camp, and he remembers that it was "like being a latch-key kid for him and his sister."

During the summer, the girls ran all over the place, and played ball with the guys. There was only one rule: since the camp closed its gate at nine, they had to be out of it. He can remember on Sundays watching the firemen start up the train so that it would be ready to go on Monday. Watching TV at the Hurse house was popular; "Mary and Eddie were always kind to the kids."

Jim played with Butchie, and "they always had to drag Mickey around with them." He remembers that they would take Mickey to the top of a hill with a bike and push him down it. "If Mickey did it just right, he would crash and burn into the blackberry bushes." When I asked Mickey about this, he stated, "He is not telling the story right; I didn't know how to ride the bike."

While they had a lot of fun in the camp, some sad things happened they had to deal with. They had friends move out of the camp. And they even had to deal with the death of one of their friends. Butchie Hurse died while they were still living in the camp, and some of the boys saw this accident happen.

The children grew up close, and they still keep in touch with one another. They used to have a reunion every couple of years, but now some of them are gone. Even though their lives led them down different paths, they have a bond from the past that will always be there.

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CCHS Image #8371.511

These Svensen area boys knew how to have fun.
Glass plate negative by Elmer Coe, ca. 1900.

Courtesy of Stan Simson

Another Elvis Sighting...September, 2007 at the Liberty Theater in Astoria. Ralph Norgaard as "Elvis" with Dave Urell providing transportation.